

Notes for CURSOR #6

January 1979

Ron Jeffries, Publisher



"Modern man is the victim
of the very instruments he
values most." Lewis Mumford

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A CURSOR GLANCE

Thank you! Our mail continues to bring nice letters from happy subscribers. Sure, we have had a few complaints, but generally people are very pleased with the software they receive (although they would like to get it a little sooner...)

I read most of the personal mail myself, even when I don't have time. Whenever possible, I try to jot a quick reply. By not bothering to have my letters typed, I save quite a bit of time and effort. Besides, we don't want you to think we are just another small software house like IBM or NCR...

SOFTWARE REALITIES

I want to thank each of you for the support you have given CURSOR. Although there is no way to know, several subscribers have mentioned that they believe that very few people are making "freebie" copies of CURSOR. Consider this excerpt from a letter:

"I belong to the Mid-Peninsula PET Users Group...Your magazine was discussed at the last meeting and it was unanimously decided that no portion of it would be allowed in our library for the purpose of copying as we know that this would hamper your circulation. The purpose of our users group is the free exchange of software, but we would not wish to undermine a fine publication such as yours".

I want to thank the members of the Mid-Peninsula PET Users Group for recognizing this issue of software copying, and stating a clear policy. I'm sorry to say that I also know of a group of PET users associated with a large firm in Southern California where a single person subscribes to CURSOR, then distributes programs to the group. Here are some thoughts about the issue:

Software publishers such as CURSOR, CLOAD (published for the TRS-80 by my friend Ralph McElroy), Creative Computing, Personal Software and Kilobaud and a host of garage operations all face a common problem: how much to charge for a single program or a group of programs. The CURSOR/CLOAD approach has been to price our software magazines quite low, and develop a high volume. The low price discourages most people from going to the trouble of making illegal copies for their friends.

What we don't know is how many people will rip us off regardless of how great the product is and how low it is priced. My subscriber at the large aerospace company evidently doesn't realize the long term impact of his actions. Each subscription that we don't sell because of a rip-off copy is one less subscription over which the fixed costs of our operation can be spread. At the limit, software for personal computers may not be a feasible product until Texas Instruments comes out with a ROM-only method of distributing software. However, I think that the consumer is better served by small companies such as CURSOR that are trying to produce high quality software for the mass market.

The bottom line is simple: at your next User Group meeting, bring up the problem of copying software that is commercially produced. And thanks again to the vast majority of you that already respect the effort we are expending to put out good software at a low price.

P.S. I'd love to get mail on this matter. Let me know what you think!

CURSOR #6 HAS THESE PROGRAMS:

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| COVER | Let this graphic design by Jim Hinds run for a few minutes to see an interesting pattern. Press the "Space" key when you want to see the Table of Contents. |
| BOX | Howard Arrington wrote this simulation of the Parker Brother's game "Black Box". One of the more difficult logic games we have seen - be prepared to spend a few hours testing your brain... |
| BJACK | John Melissa wrote this game from his home town of Las Vegas. Double down, take insurance, bet your next paycheck! |
| PACK | If you write large PET programs you will appreciate this handy routine that eliminates all blanks from your Basic program. |
| LIST | But what if you need to look at that PACKed program? LIST to the rescue, with blanks inserted, line numbers aligned, and best of all, cursor keys shown in the standard "spelled out" form, e.g. [DOWN], etc. |
| CEDPR | A program to print files produced by the CED Cursor Editor from CURSOR #4. Allows you to print any number of files as one output file to the printer. |

MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAMS

BOX... This game may warp your mind. Well, at least you will probably waste several enjoyable hours with it. The idea is quite simple: in front of you is a black box with several (you decide how many) atoms hidden inside. In your laboratory you inject "rays" at carefully chosen locations, and observe the results. The rules about what happens to a ray that passes near an atom are a bit complicated. And of course, after one atom has its effect on the ray, it may then pass near another atom which will again change its direction. I think you will want to have the Parker Brothers game beside your PET in order to get the most fun from our game. That may sound odd, but actually, their game is much more fun when played with a computer than when played on a board. Author - Howard Arrington. Edited by Glen Fisher.

BJACK... As I wrote these notes, I played another quick game to remember how this program works. At one point I was playing very aggressively and was ahead \$20,750. My wife Jann suggested that I quit playing and take the money home. Instead I bet \$20,000. And lost. In this version of Blackjack you can double down and can buy insurance. Due to default values that were carefully chosen, it is easy and fun to play. For example, you can repeat your most recent bet by just pressing "Return". John Melissa wrote the game, Glen Fisher edited it.

PACK and LIST... are a pair of handy routines. PACK takes all the blanks out of a program (except those in REMarks and inside of quotes), and so can save quite a bit of space when working with a large program. After it is loaded, type: SYS(826) to use it on whatever program is in memory. LIST does a couple of nice things for you. For one thing, it lets you read those programs that have all the blanks squeezed out! In addition to putting the blanks back in, it lines up the line numbers and also translates the cursor commands into the notation used by several magazines when they print listings of PET programs. NOTE: LIST uses the top two pages of your PET's memory. If you use the LIST program, then want to load and use a different program, type: POKE 135,32 which tells the PET that it has all of its memory back.

CEDPR... is a print program that lets you list one or more CED files (see CURSOR #4) on a printer. We use the CMC PET ADA 1200 adapter, and a DECWRITER II. The CMC adapter works like a charm (although it is too bad that they didn't make it easier to change the speed or "baud rate", rather slow, as it is written in Basic.

NESTAR SYSTEMS

NESTAR Systems of 810 Garland Drive, Palo Alto, CA 94303 (415/327-0125) has developed what promises to be an exciting new capability for small computers. They have designed a system called CLUSTER/ONE which acts as a master controller and disk resource for up to 15 PET computers (you can also use Radio Shack TRS-80's or Apples). Programs and data files are shared among the users of CLUSTER/ONE. They are stored on floppies that are attached to the central computer. They claim that system response time for program loading is typically two seconds!

I think that the new PET-II which has a real keyboard may make it practical to use something like the Nestar CLUSTER/ONE in serious applications. The price of \$4500 for the central command unit and disk drives may seem a little steep, until you compare what a system from DEC or Data General with the same capabilities might cost.

CHANNEL DATA BOOK

If you would like to have a single well organized source of information about Pet software and hardware, consider the Channel Data Book. It is a looseleaf binder with tabs for the major categories such as: Software, Hardware and peripherals, PET literature, and listings of some 1000 Pet programs! You get regular updates as part of your purchase price, and easy to follow instructions for filing new, revised material.

Order the CHANNEL DATA BOOK now from CURSOR. The low price of \$20.00 includes the Data Book and updates for 1979. California residents, add 6% sales tax so Jerry Brown will have enough money to run for President. To our Canadian friends: sorry, but that is \$20 in U.S. funds. We pay shipping in the US and Canada. Please send check or money order to: CURSOR, Box 550, Goleta, CA 93017

ETC, ETC

Send \$1.00 to: Vancouver PET News, Box 35353, Stn. "E", Vancouver, BC, V6M 4G5, for a copy of their newsletter. It looks like they have an active group! The PET must be selling very well in Canada from what we know. I wonder when the US Commodore people are going to go North and find out how to get their act together??

SKYLES ELECTRIC WORKS 599 N. Mathilda Ave, Suite 26, Sunnyvale, CA 94086 (408/735-7891) is offering several good PET products. They have a nice big keyboard for only \$125, and have memory expansion boards. Bob Skyles was the Chief Engineer for PET when it went into production. He may even know a thing or two about the machine, eh?

"There are two ways to slide easily through life: to believe everything or to doubt everything. Both ways save us from thinking." - Alfred Korzybski -